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ABSTRACT

The Feeling Words Curriculum, a curriculum that integrates the cognitive and affective domains in one course of study, is described in this paper. The opening sections explain how "feeling words," key vocabulary terms, are used to provide the missing link from one person's life to another's. Stressing the importance of helping students to develop humanistically and emotionally as well as intellectually, the next sections explain how to infuse this curriculum into a seventh through twelfth grade social studies format, giving examples of how the curriculum has already worked with sixth grade students. Procedures for introducing the vocabulary words and projects for reinforcing them are given next. The paper then mentions the functions of the right hemisphere of the brain and gives exercises dependent on right hemispheric processees. A few additional assignments close the paper. (JL)

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THE FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM

THE MISSING LINK

Marvin Maurer

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DATE: 1984

TO: Everyone

FROM: Everyman

TO whom it may concern:

It didn't have to come to this. It could have been different. We should have seen that:

Humans reached a state of alienation: personal, national and international communication became impossible.

Human arrogance could not be divested of its cloak - pretentious expertise.

Human expectations fell down into the world of negative expectations.

Human uniqueness was swallowed up in the whirlpool of sameness:

Human hostility and rage supplanted objective judgment.

Human compassion was thought to be inappropriate.

Human despair negated altruistic commitments.

Human purposefulness was no longer part of the human legacy.

Humans suppressed their feelings to the point that they were no longer able to restrain themselves or human destiny.

The underlined words you have just read are part of a curriculum called Feeling Words.

THE FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM
THE MISSING LINK

The Feeling Words Curriculum is a systematically constructed thesis embracing a new philosophy and attitude that can accommodate the personal, social, and academic needs of today's child. I have designed this curriculum for the very important purpose of integrating the cognitive and affective domains in one course of study.

Traditionally, cognitive development has been, and still is, primarily related to and involved with verbal, analytical and logical thinking, all left-hemispherically based functions. My experience has convinced me that higher levels of human expression, both social and academic, depend on both left and right=hemispheric processes as well as psychogenic factors (affective.)

An Overview of the Curriculum

1) Students learn through both right (affective) and left - hemispheres. (Note - my curriculum infuses, systematically, right - hemispheric capabilities. The results, while extremely important for social studies or any academic discipline, become part of the student's total repertoire.)

2) Students learn to use Feeling Words which help them to zero in on their feelings. As a result, they become more aware of how and what they feel about themselves as well as others.

3) The use of specific language (Feeling Words) enables the student to be both cognitively and affectively (emotionally) involved during discussions and writing assignments. In this way, the study of history and contemporary life is understood in greater depth than would be possible in traditional curricula.

4) In addition to academic gains, the student perceives life and his/her own lifestyle more comprehensibly, in terms of thoughts, feelings and subsequent actions.

5) Students understand more about themselves through the experience of others.

6) Students open up creative channels. (Note - as a teacher and critical observer of my students over the past ten years, I have concluded the following: The more a student has access to and an outlet for his creative impulses, the less destructively inclined and more productively involved is the individual. This is what the Feeling Words Curriculum is all about.)

All of the above will be addressed throughout the body of this paper.

Feeling Words and The Missing Link

Feeling Words are introduced and subsequently understood as concepts - NOT WORDS - with many kinds of human implications. Once acquired, these references are translated into positive behavioral changes both inside and outside the classroom. In addition, using Feeling Words as a base, students can relate, through subjective and vicarious means, with human circumstances far exceeding any one individual's limited references (this is accomplished by using The Missing Link).

I have found that in order for students to identify with and subsequently discuss or write about human circumstances - whether they are historical or contemporary - there is the need to find "The Missing Link" that will bridge the gap between one human's life and another. This "Link" has to do with those aspects of the human condition that remain timeless: Anger, exultation, anxiety, dismay, dispair, pride, etc. By using the Missing Link, students are able to relate to people and events, whenever they have taken place, with far greater understanding. In short, students are involved both intellectually and emotionally with others as well as themselves. (This is made possible through articulate use of The Feeling Words.)

Comments taken verbatim from two student's papers:

"I have many suppressed feelings that I dare not let out in words, only tears. I am aware that this kind of suppression can lead to stupid or even irrational acts." "The idea of being a Roman Gladiator, and having to fight my friend to the death, makes me feel enraged. It is hard to believe the Roman Emperors were so sadistic and inhuman." (The underlined words are Feeling Words).

Feeling Words Objective Grades 4 - 12 Feeling Words Curriculum 1980

Knowing who we are - in terms of what we feel - is the key to knowing others; this, in turn, establishes the probability of positive, constructive, and productive interpersonal relationships-which can only lead to a more meaningful, purposeful and healthy existance.

K - 12 Objective K - 12 Social Studies Programs - 1984

"Simply stated, a person who understands himself/herself is the kind of human being who can behave in a productive mode and exercise public responsibility in a democratic way."

The role of today's educator must exceed beyond the cognitive domain. I am not at all suggesting curricular commitment be compromised. I only mean to point out that today's child is faced with a technological society that places demands on the human race that heretofore were non-existant. My heart and mind tells me that this circumstance demands that the educational community help its students to develop humanistically and emotionally as well as intellectually. I believe my Feeling Words curriculum to be a significant step in this direction.

Curriculum Infusion

To infuse my curriculum into the 7-12 Social Studies format will require far less effort than I originally anticipated. Without going into detail, the most difficult task will be to identify key words and concepts that will be critical to the finalized 7-12 curriculum. At that point, the Feeling Words curriculum and Social Studies become one.

This far I have basically discussed the why or reasons for my program. Before going into the curriculum itself, I think it is appropriate to introduce some examples of what can be accomplished with average 6th grade students.

Monticello students examine accused assassin's catalysts

By PETER SCHOENBERG
Staff Writer

MONTICELLO — A Monticello sixth-grader walked into class earlier this week with a cardboard doll representing the man accused of shooting President Reagan.

Opening the chest, she revealed its paper heart bearing the quote: "I suppressed so much that I had to explode."

The student at the Monticello Middle School constructed the revealing doll as part of a program created by social studies teacher Marvin Maurer to help children better understand themselves and others.

The natural topic for this week's "Little People Feeling Words" program was John W. Hinckley Jr., the 25-year-old drifter accused of shooting the President and three others Monday.

The words the Monticello youngsters used to describe Hinckley were "alienated", "hostile", "masochistic" and "suppressed." Maurer said he has introduced his students so far to as many as 70 of what he terms "feeling" words.

Unlike the reactions of many adults this week, the children viewed the accused man sympathetically rather than angrily. In essays and class discussion, they suggested the tragic shooting might have been avoided if Hinckley had more openly expressed his feelings earlier in life.

Maurer said encouraging students to more freely express their feelings is a major goal of his program. He asked the students to describe what kind of person they think Hinckley is.

"He could be a person who suppresses and internalizes his emotions to a point that he had to explode by trying to assassinate a president," wrote Marnie Ross.

Sean Gill described how the incident made him feel: "I feel a lot of strong emotions, but the one I feel the most is despair. I feel despair because I know that everybody doesn't agree with everybody else. Everybody has a different opinion and there's always a jerk who has to use a violent act to have his way out, and to me it seems like it will never stop."

Danny DeSimone also was sympathetic. "He might have had a rough childhood. Something might have made him enraged. He might have tried to suppress his feelings and emotions or he just couldn't hold them in anymore."

"I feel maybe he was insecure before he committed this crime and when he was younger, he suppressed his emotions from the world, and he had to let it all out and shoot the President," wrote Stephanie Blythe.

Melissa DiSpirito saw the problem as beginning with Hinckley's relationship with his family.

"Children and parents should have an intimate relationship," she wrote. "If his parents will not talk to him, the parents probably don't care enough to take him for medical help. After awhile, it builds up so much anger that he takes it out on someone he dislikes or resents his mother or father," she wrote.

Julie Greenwald examined Hinckley's reported infatuation with a young actress he never met.

"I think that one of Hinckley's feelings was to prove to Jodie Foster a historical moment in her honor. He proved it by identifying with Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who went down in history."

Prior to the article, the students had about three hours experience with the curriculum - interspersed in fifteen to twenty minute segments over a period of approximately three months. (Note - I estimate this program to involve not more than fifteen hours of classroom time during an entire year. This estimate is based on my class experience with the program during the past three years as part of my Middle School Social Studies Curriculum)

The attempted assassination of the Pope prompted reactions such as:

I believe that it is totally irrational for this world to work as it is at this moment! I think most of the cause is that the parents actually train their children to distain other children!

The following student illustrates how the past and present are brought together using "The Missing Link".

You are a Homo Erectus man who has been frozen in a mountainside for the past 500,000 years. In some fantastic way you are released and find yourself on the outskirts of New York City. As you proceed to enter the city you feel.....

As I entered the city a wave of negative expectations swept over me. Every thing here was different thom what I was used to, the people were of assorted colors and when they saw me they sometimes stared, others turned away quickly telling their children to turn around. I felt an odd mixture of anxiety and frustration for I didnt know what to do except just stand and stare at this place. But in away I felt proud for my world had always been happy but this world looked swamped with depression

Criteria for chosen papers: Legibility and content; affective cognitive. No papers were edited or rewritten. All papers were written in class (10-15 min.).

Introduction of Vocabulary

Each and every vocabulary word and related question has been chosen to allow and encourage students and teacher to reflect on situations and circumstances that have been and continue to be significant in their every day lives. (An important objective of this curriculum is to have students understand that other people feel the same or similar in given situations. This objective is achieved by hearing students and teacher react to the question. This is not group therapy. The responses help students to feel less unusual, freaky, etc. By identifying with the group, they understand more about themselves through others.)

Before any term is ever introduced, both myself and students respond to the question I ask. For example: What happened when you entered a situation feeling you were going to do badly, or even fail? (Typical responses: "I struck out", "I did lousy on the test" etc.). At a certain point in the discussion, I introduce the term negative-expectations. After the term is introduced we explore the idea that if we or other people (teachers, parents, friends) have negative-expectations, of our performance - it often leads to failure or minimal success. Moreover, the failure is often a result of self or other imposed attitudes, as opposed to competence.

(Note - the discussion and how term is introduced is done very systematically. However, this and other aspects of the curriculum will not be addressed in detail. I think it would be far too time consuming, and not relevant to this paper's objective.)

Rationale For Above Procedure

1. Recall of events brings in both visual and auditory processes. Both systems are directly related to the right hemisphere.

2. Anecdotes tend to elicit interest, which in turn, puts the student in the right frame of mind for learning words or anything.

3. Emotions are involved which help to complete the process (assimilation of content).

The above activity, as is frequently the case with most terms, acts as a base for future discussion: How do we change negative attitudes (or anything negative) to positive" This discussion considers the kinds of steps that are necessary for a turn-about or change to occur. For example:

1. To be aware of the negative;

2. The want to change;

3. How to change;

4. The commitment to change.

As illustrated above, the question answer sequence is used as a starting point for further exploraton. In this next illustration, cultural aspects of the 20th century are compared to ancient world customs. For example: How is an orthodontist different from a regular dentist? After students discuss their dental problems and have demonstrated their understanding of specialization, we proceed to go back in time to the ancient farm community where "Division of Labor" became a reality for the first time. The discussion concludes in the present: Students understand that specialization and "Division of Labor" as we know it today (in all areas of society) has its roots "way back then" in the ancient world. (Note - During the discussion, all ten K-12 concepts are touched upon and developed throughout the year.)

Projects Used for Reinforcement of Vocabulary
(Ongoing from the start)

1. Comic Strips - Students look at different facial expressions and label the character(s) and/or entire comic strip with vocab words and explanations.

2. Magazines - Same as above (1).

3. Poems, Essays and Newspaper Articles - Same as above (1) plus a written reaction when material is involved with personal, social, or political issues.

4. Drawing Pictures - Students think of a vocabulary word and its meaning and then proceed to draw a person's face or picture; or conversely draw pictures and decide on appropriate vocabulary.

5. Diary - This is done in the traditional way with one important addition: The students use Feeling Words to record their reactions to what they experienced. In this way, the recorded event takes on more dimension, in terms of self-awareness.

6. Self-Inventory - Children record a list of emotions (using Feeling Words) that they experience in any given day.

7. Designs - Students recall significant experiences and write about same. They then draw designs reflective of experience and explain why the designs look like the experience.

The Right Hemispheric Domain

All of the above projects, as well as much of what has been discussed thus far - bring in and employ right-hemispheric processes. Again, I do not think it is within the province of this paper to explicate in detail what the right hemisphere's role is. However, I believe it will add insight to mention briefly the following functions of and reasons for "bringing in" this "mute" hemisphere.

In addition to identifying all symbolic stimuli (drawn, written and seen) and remembering all verbal stimuli - the right-hemisphere is responsible for all forms of creative expression ranging from new plumbing devices to classical music and art. As if this were not enough, the limbic system, which is located in the right-hemisphere, processes the emotions (affective).

This "mute" or right-hemisphere has probably been in the developmental stages for at least 3 to 5 million years. (The verbal part of the left-hemisphere is only about 100,000 years in existence) The problem, however, is that for the last 5 to 10 thousand years, the left brain (verbal) has experienced incredible growth - largely excluding the right-hemisphere's role. In any event, this circumstance has created a situation whereby we are unwittingly and systematically diminishing the artistic and creative voices as well as what is left of intuition.

Roger Sperry has concluded: "Both hemispheres have been found to be essentially comparable in self-concept and cognitive awareness. The only difference in these two hemispheres is the left can "talk" about it."

Robert E. Samples: "It doesn't matter whether we're dealing with corporate vice presidents, teachers and students, husbands and wives or parents and children, intuition is cast in a lesser role than logic....With such an emphasis on the rational and logical, it is no wonder that levels of normal neurosis are so high."

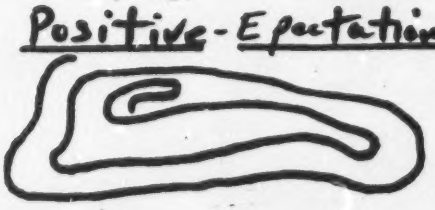
Gail Sheehy: "All our conventional teaching methods exercise the left part of the brain....The kind of foreign policy that gave us the Bay of Pigs and the Vietnamize strategy is a global extension of it."

Abraham Maslow: "Human beings reach the highest expressions of their existence when their entire essence as a being is blended into the synergic involvement of all their capacities at once."

Designs and Learning - All the Following exercises are completely dependent on right-hemispheric processes.

Each activity has at least 5 to 10 variations. They are truly but a microscopic part of the curriculum. I have recopied some of the students' work for illustration purposes. (Their work is far more artistic - colors, full page, etc.) (Note - To record the developmental sequence leading to the results would again be far too time consuming.)

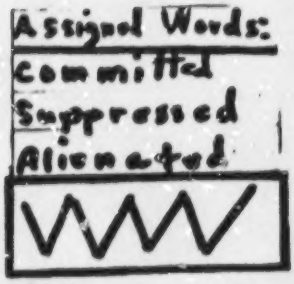
Positive Expectations



"The design looks like the term's meaning, because when you have positive expectations, everything goes nice and smooth, like the lines in this design."

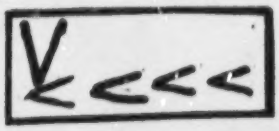
"When the earth's population started, there were few people and relatively little progress. As the evolutionary process accelerated, humankind (in terms of numbers) as well as technology, became an uncontrollable circumstance. The highest curve denotes a devastating possibility. It goes back to the beginning, which could be what nuclear warfare is all about."

The above activity involved the students in the drawing of designs after a discussion pertaining to motivation and progress. (This was a 10th grade assignment).



I assign many designs like this. The task is to explain how the meanings of assigned words look like the designs. Student response: "A crippled person is falling down but is committed to staying up." "The square stomach is all knotted up with suppessed feelings." "The squiggly in the center is alienated from his friends, the other squigglies.

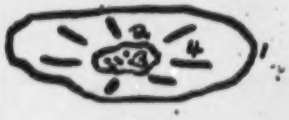
Another student - telling a simple story using Feeling Words:



"The big one is a sadist and is having fun hitting the small one. The small ones are enraged over being tormented. I believe it is irrational behavior on the part of the big one."

This next activity uses designs with content. (For the sake of space, I have chosen a small paragraph to illustrate. However, the majority of kids can do page(s) even chapters using designs.

The Acropolis was located in the center of each city-state. It was the place where the rulers lived and worked. The location made it difficult for the enemy to get to the rulers.



1) City-state
2) The Acropolis
3) Rulers
4) The city which protected the rulers.

Again, the activities illustrated above are but a microscopic part of the program. (Notes (1) Often when kids take quizzes and can't remember vocabulary words or content, they think "images", which allows for success a good deal of the time. (2) Non verbal or less verbal kids show marked improvement within weeks using designs).

Final Comment About Designs:

Whatever the academic gains in using designs are should be viewed as less significant than the overall gain, which is to help the student to become far more creative, intuitive and holistic in his thoughts, feelings and actions.

An example of a quiz using Feeling Words and key words from curriculum content to complete the statements.

1. There are those who think of J. Caesar as having been humanistic and altruistic when he pardoned his enemies.
2. The plebians felt exultation when they were given the privilege of having their own two tribunes as part of the oligarchy.
3. Children of Roman slaves were often alienated from their parents.
4. The Roman overseers could be described as sadistic.
5. Sparticus wanted his men to realize that only free men could experience genuine feelings of pride, self esteem, positive-expectations or security.

During a writing assignment, this student identified with the idea of being Julius Caesar (with one historical addition) - He knows Brutus is out to get him.

I'm stunned, I'm drowning in alienation. The thought that my best friend would do a thing like this depresses me. I'll never be entirely secure again. I can't trust anyone. I'm all alone, falling slowly into a deep pool of dis pair.

Significant Personal and Social Issues

This is an ongoing activity that runs the gamut from classroom discussions to writing assignments.

For example: The way people treat us can significantly affect the way we feel about ourselves. Who are the most important people in our lives? How do these people make us feel good-bad? This discussion is directed towards understanding that, in the final analysis, it is we who should make the final judgment about who we are in terms of what we feel.

This concept-owning up to our own actions, both internally and externally - is further understood through an historic inquiry. Who or what did the ancient Greeks consider to be responsible for good and bad fortunes? The historic answer, God, leads to further discussion; namely, ascribing success, failure, etc. to anyone or anything other than ourselves, can, and often will, preclude further action.

Other Types of Discussions:

1) What kinds of disciplines are there?

   What is the difference between self and other imposed discipline?

2) What makes people act out against society - against themselves?

3) What kinds of feelings lead to drug abuse?

All discussions lead to writing assignments. I have chosen to close this paper with an average 6th grade child's reflections on the drug issue.

I think this paper ends on a note that is very close to my own feelings, and perhaps, provides the real reason that I wrote the "Feeling Words Curriculum."

People who take drugs are really masochistic. They feel hostile towards people because they are frustrated and insecure. They internalize their feelings instead of externalizing them. They feel they are in dispair or inferior to others. Once they take drugs they get hooked on them and are anxious to get on to real heavy dope like grass. They do not feel inappropriate about what they are doing. They think its right. They think, "Well maybe it will help, who knows?" And maybe — "who cares?"

Nature does not concern itself with what is human and humane - This is for human beings to do.

Marvin Maurer, Author

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